

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am here today to urge for the passage of HB 176. My name is Mary Gilluly, and I am the former social services director at Ponderosa Pines Healthcare, a nursing home, in Billings. During my tenure there, I became acquainted with a resident who loved to hunt, fish, trap—essentially—he loved all things “outdoors.” As we got to know each other better, even while he was not expected to live through the summer, he told me he wanted one last antelope season.

I encouraged that—much to my later dismay—as he had always drawn tags in 511, a five minute drive away, but 2010 turned out to be the year he didn’t. His last year, almost certainly, of hunting antelope, and he drew no tags close by enough that he could actually hunt.

After talking with Joe Maurier and Hank Worsech on the phone, there appeared no remedy in sight—without legislative change—and a letter to the Governor confirmed that there was not a way for us to petition for a special tag for a terminally ill hunter. According to the Billings Gazette, FWP gets approximately four requests like this a year, far less than the 25 opportunities proposed by this bill. I was disturbed there was no mechanism in place for those four people to get a tag, and fortunately, other folks, including legislators, were disturbed as well.

In Barry’s case, this wasn’t a death bed wish, as I would guess is the same for the other three requestors; he wanted to end his life doing something he had done his entire life. And he wanted to do it legally and ethically. It wouldn’t have been his first antelope hunt, but it would have been his last, and it seemed there should be some way to do that. I understand, we don’t want transferable tags that could be abused, and I understand, we have to follow the recommendations of the biologists about just how many tags are available, or surplus, in a given area. Not only do I teach hunter education, but I am a biologist by training—and have worked on reproductive studies of antelope, in particular—so truly I do understand the need to insure that this is a very prescriptive process and does not force FWP to make very difficult decisions regarding who is most deserving of a tag for the terminally ill.

Barry has taken a turn for the worse, though he says, as I will tell you, we all hope he will see the passage of what I affectionately call, “Barry’s Law”, HB 176.

In addition to Barry’s comments, I have attached a letter from his sister. She, her husband, and I were able to take him fishing this summer, and he did catch a couple fish on the Yellowstone. The day after, when I told him I’d gone online and found we had failed in our quest for an antelope tag, he said to me, “So, yesterday was it? My last great adventure in the Montana outdoors?” Fortunately, it wasn’t, and he was able to get a mule deer doe the third day of rifle season. And fortunately, people were kind enough to cook that, as well as the antelope steaks that arrived for him anonymously. But, he wanted to get his own last antelope, and he should have been able to at least try, legally and ethically, as he always wanted.